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ABSTRACT

The following points are made in discussing the practical and political problems involved in implementing a teaching evaluation system for rewarding and improving instructional effectiveness. (1) We have an obligation to put a higher priority on teaching than we have done so far. (2) Any evaluation system should be tied to a strong system for teaching improvement. (3) There will probably not be wide acceptance of the proposal because: in times of shrinking resources, support tends to go to existing programs; adoption of the program would require the education of administrators and faculty; there is not a one-to-one relationship between good teaching and good research; there is a strong pay-off to research; there can be no significant change without broad acceptance of the program. (Author/KE)

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A Discussion of A Proposed System for Rewarding And Improving Instructional Effectiveness

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Once upon a time, there was a University named Aipot U.* (better known as A.U.). It was a medium-sized place with a student body which had about three-four undergraduate students per every graduate student. The students were actually a pretty homogeneous lot of above-average, middle-American kids. There was no real financial problems because, although A.U. was a private institution, it had such strong support from the citizens of its state that, whenever endowment monies fell off, the state legislature voted appropriations to make up the deficit.

The faculty and the administration--at all levels--understood their respective responsibilities and there was an air of complete trust between them. The administration took seriously the words it spoke about support for the trilogy of teaching, research, and public service and operated within the philosophy that it did not expect each individual faculty member to be all things to all people; nor did it expect that each faculty member could be equally proficient in all three areas encompassed by the trilogy. Thus, it spoke of a well-rounded faculty made up of lop-sided people.

The faculty recognized that its primary role was 1) to advance the frontiers of knowledge and 2) to disseminate knowledge to students at all levels at A.U., as well as to whatever audience outside the University that might be interested. This recognition, coupled with the aforementioned trust of the administration as well as a complete trust in the intellectual integrity of each of its own members, allowed the faculty to do its extra-curricular work--personnel activities, curriculum development, etc.,--in a minimum amount of time. Because of this spirit of trust, committees appointed by the Faculty Senate found that, although they were kept honest by a requirement that they seek all possible counsel on whatever the subject of their investigation was, once they reported out it was recognized that their study made them the most expert of all their peers and, most usually, committee reports were accepted as bases for actions. Thus, Senate Meetings were crisp and short. The faculty was also assured that, when its recommendations were forwarded to its administration, they would be accepted, or if not, returned with detailed discussion of why such recommendations were not in the best interests of A.U. at that specific time.

There was no tenure problem because, once a year, faculty and administration representatives would meet to update an on-going five-year academic plan which defined the goals and objectives of the school. Each department would then define its own objectives within the framework of the plan. Department heads and individual faculty would meet at least once annually to appraise the work of the past year and define directions for the coming year. Because of this free and

*With apologies to Samuel Butler and "Erewhon"

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continual flow of communication--up, down, and laterally--the faculty member's status was always clear to himself and to his department, both as a function of institutional need and of personal goals and capabilities.

The balance of faculty contribution to teaching, research, and service was maintained even though older faculty who might, at the start of their careers, have been highly productive in, for example, the research area, slowed their productivity. They merely shifted their emphasis to one of the other two areas, continued to make a contribution, and had their roles in the research area assumed by younger faculty.

But meanwhile, back at the ranch.

The ideal Aipot U. never, of course, existed and, in the current mood of our society, probably stands very little chance of being created.

First of all, I should make my own position clear. My heart is with the Aleamoni proposal. Larry and I talked about this rather extensively as he was developing his paper and he knows that my sympathies are strongly with him. In fact, I have fought and continue to fight the battle on my own campus. However, my charge today was to discuss "...the feasibility of accomplishing...and the practical and political problems the university would face in implementing such a system." In line with this, I must admit that I see a great feasibility gap between the concept proposed and its accomplishment.

Academic inertia is normally so great that changes are only extremely slowly effected. Some changes were brought about in the late '60's and early '70's by a confluence of circumstances which resulted in near revolution. The concerns about the war in Vietnam; the assassinations of the few charismatic leaders we had in this country--Kennedy and King; the rapid growth of higher education, especially in the public sector; and the lack of understanding or definition of the role of such higher education as it affected the new clienteles being given first-time access, all led to the turmoil. Some changes were effected but basically, the system remained the same.

In the past few years, other factors have come into play. The emotional years seem to have drained the spirit of both young and old alike and has brought about a disenchantment with the higher educational system. In addition, we have seen a slowdown in growth of enrollments, we have seen an inflation which has bitten deeply into the resources available to institutions, and we have seen, and are still seeing a recession (or is it depression?) which is also cutting into the financial support from both tuitions (an extreme concern of private institutions) and appropriations (an extreme concern of public ones).

The impact of the above, has, in many instances, put higher education in some instances into a state of disarray and in others, into a conservative retrenchment mode. From what I can see, resource support which, for a while, was being channeled into either new academic programs (Universitites Without Walls, interdisciplinary courses, and the like) or into new academic support programs (such as teaching evaluation and improvement) has now been slowed down, if not stopped, or is being redirected toward more traditional programs.

Also, in spite of the many words spoken in recent years, I have seen no visible change in the reapportionment of weighting factors between research, service, and teaching when such matters as appointment, promotion, and tenure are being considered. It is interesting to me that in this regard faculty have been just as resistant to change as have been administrators. Thus, untenured faculty are still cautioned about extending themselves too far beyond the area of research both for internal reasons--getting tenure--and external ones--marketability just in case tenure does not come through. Thirdly, as resources shrink some supposedly intelligent, intellectual people begin to feel threatened and start to act in ways which they themselves would not use as models in their own areas of professional endeavor. One of our faculty who was, at one time, president of our State Senate, once told me that he did not know what politics was until he affiliated with the University--and I know that we are not unique.

If the kind of system which Larry Aleamoni proposes is to become a more common phenomenon, and if it is to be a strong viable one in those institutions where it is instituted, there are some significant philosophical changes which are required. Such changes will, at least in the short run, cost something. The cost may be economic in the form of people and material resource costs. Some may argue with me but the popular adage "There is no such thing as a free lunch" is, I believe, applicable in this instance.

The cost, in this day of stable, or shrinking resources may be a sociological one. That is, if people are brought in to staff a teaching improvement and evaluation shop, it may mean that another area will have to be cut.

But, even more than this, there must be costs involved in the evaluation follow-up, that is, the improvement end of the spectrum. I believe that if the two things--evaluation and improvement--are not linked, the system is not doing what its primary mission should be.

And the improvement aspect adds to costs, if in no other way but in the cost of faculty time required to study and learn about what I have heard Bob Davis call "Teaching by Design" which involves the exercise of defining goals and objectives for courses or programs. But even beyond the individual faculty members, there must be a continuing program for increasing the understanding of administrators--department heads and deans--and of faculty personnel committee members about what the process is about and what the various evaluations mean. And this is costly if in no other way but people's time.

And certainly if the improvement process is to include such things as, for example, the use of micro-teaching and the equipment required for it, the cost is bound to be a factor.

The philosophical changes must, however, extend beyond those which involve cost alone. Let me briefly discuss just two of these. The first of these involves some aspects of things present at fictitious Aipot U. which is where I started this discussion. The idea of planning seems to be anathema at institutions of higher education. Perhaps this is so because there is some concern about a possible conflict between planning and the concept of academic freedome. Perhaps it is so because, involved in planning, are such things as cost-benefit analyses with the concomitant concern that someone might take the statistics at face value. My own view is that higher educational institutions would have

been in far less trouble today had they stopped to more clearly define their audiences, their goals, their objectives. I do not want to debate the planning issue at this forum but do want to touch on one phase of the planning process which is frequently overlooked in academic institutions--individual planning. I would like to make department heads and deans really earn their keep by insisting that they plan individually with each faculty member 1) so that the faculty member knows on a regular basis where he stands vis-a-vis instructional needs and 2) so that the institution (or college or department) has the information to help justify the person's position in the scheme of things. It appears to me that appropriate planning which includes individualized evalution of total faculty performance as well as evaluation of teaching as defined in the proposal which we are considering today, would put us in a far better position to discuss what we are about with both our critics and our supporters.

And finally, I would like to discuss a philosophical change in what is usually the key to most things--the reward system. Through the years I have served, and I still serve, on many campus committees. Many of these have been involved somehow with discussions and/or development of new programs. They range from such disparate items as residential colleges, to freshman year program, to intracampus cooperation on nuclear energy programs. I guess that I have yet to be with a group that has some special interest in an activity which has not said "This is probably one of the most exciting and important ideas that has yet come down the pike and, if the administration really means what it says about supporting service, it will give us resources to make the thing go." You can substitute the words teaching or research for service in the previous sentence. The resources usually include space, money, possibly an Associate Provost for the program (to insure a voice close to top administration), and an adjustment to the reward system. This, as I have said, is the key. There must be adjustments which will recognize the effectiveness of the evaluation techniques spelled out in the proposal we are discussing. And--there must be a willingness by both administrators and faculty to accept a weighting factor for teaching which, if not equal to that for research is heavier than what I perceive it currently to be.

By the way, even if a change in the reward system would have no impact on the attitudes of faculty currently on board, it could be implemented by changing the ground rules for the appointment of new faculty.

And so, let me summarize these many words in response to the charge of assessing the practical and political problems to be faced in implementing the teaching evaluation system under discussion.

1. I personally would strongly favor a broader acceptance of the idea. At a time when we have agreed to accept a student body whose academic backgrounds, whose vocational needs, and whose motivations are far different from those of the students who used to be our clientele, it seems to me that we have an obligation to put a higher priority on teaching than we have done so far.

2. I would want to be sure, however, that any evaluation system is tied to a strong system for teaching improvement.

3. I am not optimistic about the possibility of wide acceptance of the proposal especially at this particular time in history for the following reasons:

A. In the competition for stable, or shrinking resources, support tends to go to existing programs. This seems evident to me, at least, as I see a return to a far more conservative approach to higher education in spite of the many pressures and many words about the so-called new kind of student.

B. Related to A. is the fact that the adoption of a program of evaluation would require the education of administrators and faculty so that they themselves can understand and administer the program. This is a costly process in terms of money and time.

C. In spite of studies which Larry Aleamoni has done indicating that there is not a one-to-one relationship between good research and good teaching, people do not believe it perhaps because they prefer not to, and they will be hard to convince. One of my measures of good teaching, by the way, includes a measure of the faculty member's currency in his/her professional field.

D. There is a real pay-off to research in actual overhead dollars and, in a time of economic problems such as the present, this is frequently a strong determinant of academic directions.

E. I do not see the reward system changing significantly unless there is broad acceptance of the idea in many institutions. Such acceptance would then allow the individual faculty member who concentrated on teaching to be mobile beyond the confines of his own campus.

Unfortunately, if other campuses are like my own, and I know enough of them to say that this is the case, only a few do-gooders like myself and some education and/or psychology types keep pushing for the idea of improving the status of teaching. Even if the decision were made today to implement the kinds of things the proposal suggests, it would take time for the turnover of a generation of faculty before the system would be fully operative. My concern is that, if the decision is <u>not</u> made today, it will never come into being.